

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 BIB-01 /068 W

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R 291642Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8238

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 18483

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CH, UR

SUBJECT: CHINESE RELEASE OF SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW

1. SUMMARY: PRC REPRESENTATIVES IN MOSCOW ARE SAYING THAT THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW WAS RELEASED BECAUSE THERE WAS NO REASON TO DETAIN IT FURTHER. SOVIET PRESS PLAY REITERATES THAT THE CREW WAS HELD "ILLEGALLY," BUT NEGATIVE ITEMS ON CHINA HAVE FALLEN OFF IN THE PAST FEW DAYS. THE KEY QUESTION NOW IS HOW MOSCOW WILL RECIPROCATATE THIS SIGNIFICANT PRC GESTURE. THE BALL IS CLEARLY IN MOSCOW'S COURT. END SUMMARY.

2. AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION ON DECEMBER 28, NCNA'S MOSCOW BUREAU CHIEF WANG WEI TOLD EMBOFF THAT THE CHINESE DECISION TO RELEASE THE SOVIET HELICOPTER CREW WAS "A NEW YEAR'S PRESENT" FOR THE SOVIETS. WANG AND HIS  
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COLLEAGUE SHEN CHI-MING TOLD EMBOFFS AND FOREIGN

JOURNALISTS THAT THE CHINESE HAD THOROUGHLY INVESTIGATED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE INCIDENT AND HAD FOUND NO REASON TO DETAIN THE CREW FURTHER. WANG ALSO SAID THAT PEKING INTENDED TO RETURN THE HELICOPTER ITSELF, SINCE "THERE WAS NO REASON TO KEEP IT."

3. THE TASS REPORT ANNOUNCING THE RELEASE WAS CARRIED PROMINENTLY IN PRAVDA (DEC 28). THE ITEM REITERATED THE STANDARD SOVIET LINE THAT THE HELICOPTER, ON A MEDICAL RESCUE MISSION, HAD STRAYED OVER THE BORDER IN BAD WEATHER. A LATER TASS ITEM (DEC 29 IN ENGLISH) REPORTED THAT THE THREE CREW MEMBERS HAD ARRIVED IN MOSCOW AFTER BEING HELD IN CHINA "ILLEGALLY" SINCE MARCH 1974. THE VOLUME OF ANTI-PEKING REFERENCES IN THE SOVIET PRESS HAS BEEN NOTICEABLY LOWER IN THE PAST WEEK, AND CHINA HAS BEEN OMITTED FROM SOME RECENT SOVIET COMMENTARIES ON ANGOLA. BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL WHETHER THIS SHIFT IS A SIGNAL.

4. COMMENT: UNLESS THERE WAS SOME SORT OF HIDDEN TRADE-OFF, THE RELEASE OF THE CREW IS A SIGNIFICANT CHINESE GESTURE WHICH ALREADY PUTS THE BURDEN ON MOSCOW TO RECIPROCATE. THE MOST OBVIOUS GESTURE WOULD BE TO SEND DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER IL'ICHEV BACK TO PEKING TO RESUME THE BORDER TALKS. (IL'ICHEV LAST LEFT PEKING IN EARLY MAY 1975 AFTER A STAY OF NEARLY TWO-MONTHS -- ABOUT AVERAGE FOR THESE TALKS IN RECENT YEARS.) A SCALING DOWN OF PROPAGANDA EXCHANGES WOULD BE ANOTHER VISIBLE GESTURE. AND IF SUCH GESTURES GO FORWARD THEY COULD LEAD TOWARD BETTER STATE TO STATE RELATIONS. BUT WE HESITATE TO DRAW A SCENARIO OF RAPPROCHEMENT FROM ONE EVENT. IN OUR VIEW THE ISSUES WHICH DIVIDE THE TWO SIDES REMAIN DEEP AND WE DO NOT SEE THEM BEING RESOLVED QUICKLY OR EASILY. BUT THE SHORT-TERM EFFECT OF THIS GESTURE IS TO PUT THE ONUS ON THE SOVIETS FOR THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN RESOLVING DIFFERENCES.  
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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 29 DEC 1975  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
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**TAGS:** PFOR, CH, UR  
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